



**CITY OF COLUMBIA TENNESSEE
HISTORIC ZONING COMMISSION
STAFF REPORT**

CONTACT INFORMATION

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DOCKET/CASE/APPLICATION NUMBER

CA 22-0192

APPLICANT/PROPERTY OWNER

**Kellye Murphy, Tourism & Marketing Director
Kelli Johnson, Main Street Manager**

HEARING DATE

N/A

PROPERTY ADDRESS/LOCATION

**700 N Garden Street/Entire Downtown
Historic District**

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: Temporary Signage on Vacant Storefronts

The City of Columbia’s Tourism and Marketing Department requests the Commission’s consideration of a program to beautify vacant storefronts. When retail and office spaces undergo interior remodel, it is the current practice of contractors and building owners to cover the glazing with paper. This custom creates unsightly gaps in the retail facades of the Downtown Historic District.

Tourism and Marketing proposes an alternative to the current practice. Instead of unsightly paper, Visit Columbia will provide funding to place uniformed window and door signage on vacant facades. The temporary signage will provide a visual enhancement the Downtown Historic District. In addition, the program will demonstrate the City’s commitment to creating a welcoming appearance for residents and visitors.

The proposed signage does not conform to the Historic Design Guidelines. However, the proposal would replace unsightly opaque window coverings with aesthetically appropriate imagery. It is within the discretion of the Commission to approve temporary signage which is compatible with the character of the district.

As this request cannot conform to strict application of the Guidelines, staff declines to make a recommendation.



EXISTING ZONING	EXISTING LAND USE	SURROUNDING ZONING & LAND USE	SITE IMPROVEMENTS	Historic District
CBD (Central Business District)	Office/Retail	CBD (Central Business District)	Temporary Window Signage	Downtown

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE

APPROVE WITH CONDITIONS

DENY



Review Status and History:

Submission Status: N/A

Previous Approvals: N/A

1984 Historic Inventory: The program will likely include various structures listed in the 1984 inventory. The currently vacant space used as an illustration is identified in the inventory as a contributing building which was used as office space by the Steenbergen law firm at the time of the NR nomination.

Proposed Alterations

The applicant proposes to install temporary window and door signage on vacant storefronts throughout the Downtown Historic District.

- The signage will consist of vinyl cling material.
- The signage will depict the Maury County courthouse, families walking on Public Square, and other iconic images of downtown Columbia.
- The signage will feature text directing passersby to information about local merchants and the Columbia Main Street program.
- Exact dimensions will vary based on specific façade.
- As depicted in the illustrations, the material will cover 50% to 100% of the glass and window area.
- As depicted in the illustrations, the height and position of text will vary. The primary message will be oriented for pedestrian visibility at approximately 5.5' above the sidewalk. Additional information will be positioned closer to the bottom of the glazing.



Current Vacant Storefront



On the Way Alternative



Coming Soon Alternative

Historic District Design Guidelines Referenced:

Staff reviewed the requested alterations for consistency with the *City of Columbia Historic Design Guidelines* for new signage. The relevant sections of the Guidelines are listed below; the most applicable standards are **bolded** and underlined.

P. 8-12 Guidelines for Specific Signs (Window and Door Graphics)

Window and door graphics may be either vinyl transfers, painted on, or hung inside the glass. Such graphics are typically used as a secondary sign or set of signs that complements other types of signage. They are particularly useful for reinforcing branding concepts and drawing pedestrian attention to the storefront.

- Window and door graphics shall be appropriately scaled to the opening to maintain transparency and encourage public interaction. Per the Historic District Design Guidelines, graphics shall not cover more than 20% of any area of glass or window.
- In general, designing graphics so that individual lettering does not exceed 12 inches and that all lettering across the graphic has an average height of no more than 8 inches is recommended.
- Sign lettering and graphics shall be oriented to visibility by pedestrians. Locating graphics with a centerline height of approximately 5.5 ft. above the sidewalk is encouraged.

- Using clearly printed lettering of no more than two typefaces and eye-catching graphics is recommended.
- Neon and mass-produced illuminated signs are prohibited in windows within 3' feet of the closest window face. Signs shall be static in appearance with no flashing, blinking, or other forms of changes in light intensity.

Staff Comment:

Design Guidelines

- The Guidelines discourage graphics and window signage which cover more than 20% of any area of glass or window. The intent of this criterion is stated clearly in the Guidelines: “to maintain transparency and encourage public interaction.” The proposed signage will likely exceed the 20% maximum on each property that participates in the program. However, the current practice is to completely cover windows with paper. These opaque materials eliminate transparency and prevent public interaction with the space. The proposed signage provides an aesthetically superior temporary window covering that encourages greater public interaction. The temporary signage arguably accomplishes the intent of the Guidelines better than the current practice.
- It is not clear from the illustrations provided by Tourism and Marketing whether the lettering on the proposed signage conforms to the recommended height in the Guidelines. Similarly, the location of graphics and lettering in relationship to the adjacent sidewalk varies. These are potential discussion items for the Commission. If the Commission decides to approve the proposed signage, it should provide direction to staff on dimensional criteria which can be applied administratively on a case-by-case basis.
- Although the request does not strictly conform to the Guidelines, Section 3.12.4.I of the Zoning Ordinance authorizes the Commission to approve contemporary designs which do not harm historical, architectural, or cultural material, provided the proposal is compatible with the character of the district. The proposed signage is temporary, does not have a lasting impact on the City’s historic assets, and arguably enhances the appearance of the Downtown Historic District.



Recommendation

Recommended Motion:

None.

Alternative Motions:

Alternative Motion [Approve]:

Move to find that the proposed signage conforms to the Historic District Design Guidelines and direct staff to issue Certificates of Appropriateness on a case-by-case basis as requested by the Tourism & Marketing Department.

Alternative Motion [Approve Subject to Conditions]:

Move to approve issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness and find that the proposed signage conforms to the Historic District Design Guidelines and direct staff to issue Certificates of Appropriateness on a case-by-case basis as requested by the Tourism & Marketing Department subject to the following conditions: [list conditions of approval].

Alternative Motion [Table for Future Consideration]:

Move to find that there is insufficient information to make a decision, table the application, and request that the applicant provide: [list additional information] for review at a future meeting.

Alternative Motion [Deny]:

Move to find that the project is not compatible with the Historic District Design Guidelines, and deny issuance of a Certificate of Appropriateness [list reasons for denial].